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Nix straight-ticket ballot

You have to hand it to Sen. Peter Burling, D-Cornish, and his Democrat colleagues for their stance against straight ticket ballots. On Nov. 7, Democrats in New Hampshire were the beneficiaries of the majority of straight-ticket votes, which accounted for about one-third of all votes. That majority helped fuel the Democrats' unprecedented surge into power.

Yet, New Hampshire Democrats appear ready to stick to their principles and do away with the mechanism that so entrenched New Hampshire's long-standing Republican majorities.

We hope Democrats are successful in ending the practice. Straight-ticket ballots are an anachronism and encourage voters to remain ignorant of the issues or the true positions of candidates.

Having a straight-ticket option on the ballot encourages over-identification with political parties. It's far better to encourage voters to focus on individual candidates.

There were a lot of good Republicans who lost races they otherwise deserved to win because of straight-ticket voting — just as there have been many Republicans over the years who have held on to offices they probably didn't deserve because of the straight-ticket option.

Neither wrong makes the other right.

Also, there's research that suggests straight-ticket ballots are confusing, causing voters to make mistakes and ballots to go uncounted.

Some argue that the straight-ticket ballot is a convenience, making it worth keeping. Convenience is hardly a cornerstone of the democratic process. If anything, democracy is inconvenient, requiring every citizen to spend some time thinking about the future of a town, a state or the nation.

Voting is not supposed to be a mindless activity.

In earlier eras, when more voters were illiterate and it was more difficult for candidates to communicate with potential voters, there was a stronger argument for the simplicity straight-ticket voting offers. Today's electorate is better informed, or at least has the option to be better informed, than any in American history. And as the onslaught of political ads each cycle shows, communicating with voters is the not the challenge it once was.

The justification for straight-ticket voting simply doesn't outweigh the drawbacks.

No matter who wins the election, straight-ticket voting is a loser for democracy.